

OCTOBER 26, 2007

Weekend



Bewitching

Creating a pumpkin that makes your stoop a standout can be fiendishly easy — with our help. Page 28

TO DO

Spooky fun includes **costumed NSO musicians** and a haunted coaster **3**



ON THE MOVE

Run in a 5K with **Lance Armstrong** on Saturday in Columbia **52**



ON EXHIBIT

Baltimore **Matisse** show will bend your mind — and your body **51**



Ready, Set, Glow!

What's your idea of the perfect carved pumpkin: Funny? Scary? Traditional? Abstract? On these pages we offer five fun designs, created by **Lisa Cherkasky** and photographed by **Mark Finkenstaedt**. Before you get started, though, you need to pick the right pumpkin. But do you really know what makes a good pumpkin? The Post's **John Deiner** didn't either. So he talked to Jerry Brust, a vegetable specialist at the University of Maryland, who had these tips on picking — and preserving — the perfect pumpkin.

1. Pick a pumpkin that is completely orange. Green spots mean that it can be easily bruised; they are also likely places for the pumpkin to start rotting.

2. Size does matter. Between 15 and 18 pounds is the ideal size for carving. Don't try carving a small pumpkin.

3. The pumpkin should be firm. If you press it with your thumbnail, it should make a little dent like cardboard. If you can push in fairly far, it's going to rot. Pick up your pumpkin from the bottom. It **should feel heavier than it looks**. One that feels light is probably rotted inside.

4. Slowly pick up a pumpkin by the handle to see whether it stays attached; if it does, it's a good pumpkin. Look for handles that aren't shriveled and are still dark green. If there's no handle, that doesn't make it a bad pumpkin. But if it's soft at the top, it's likely to rot.

5. If the pumpkin is otherwise perfect but there's a notch, press around the notch; if it's soft, skip it because rot has set in.

6. Is taller or wider better? Makes no difference, Brust said. It depends more on the design you have in store for your pumpkin.

7. Fresh field or Super Fresh? In the field, pumpkins have been sitting on the ground, which is fine. But if it has been rainy (not a concern this year), the ground can be saturated, and pumpkins start to rot. If you get them at the grocery or home improvement store, they've been cured — dried off and hard enough that they pass the thumbnail test.

8. Once you have your perfect pumpkin, it's time to carve. Put petroleum jelly where you make your cuts. It prevents water loss (which will keep the pumpkin plumper for a little longer) and prevents rot from starting at the cut line.

9. Once carved, your pumpkin will last seven to 10 days. If you don't carve it, it could last a month or more. If there's a frost for a couple of days, consider bringing the pumpkin in to prevent rot.

10. If you want the pumpkin to last longer, use a battery-operated light to illuminate it. If you use candles, which can cause the pumpkin to decay more quickly because they burn so hot, sprinkle the bottom of the lid of your pumpkin with nutmeg. It'll make a nice aroma when the candle is burning. Of course, be sure to keep a careful eye on candlelit pumpkins, especially around kids and animals.

■ **FOR MORE PROJECTS, see Page 30**

ON WASHINGTONPOST.COM



For a narrated slideshow of our pumpkin projects, plus our searchable list of area pumpkin patches (for your last-minute jack-o'-lantern needs), visit www.washingtonpost.com/weekend.



Pumpkins can depict more than funny faces, including stars, moons and cats. Carving the cat is tricky but worth the effort. You can use the template on Page 31 or print one out at www.washingtonpost.com/weekend

STARS AND MORE

Try Thinking Outside the Smiley Face



For any of the carved pumpkins on these pages, start by using a paring knife to cut a hole in the bottom of the pumpkin, above, giving you more of the entire pumpkin to work with. Then use a sturdy metal spoon to scrape the inside walls of the pumpkin. Try to thin the wall to one inch thick. That makes carving easier.



The stars-and-moon pumpkin will wow the neighbors, and you don't have to tell them that you just hammered cookie cutters into the pumpkin to make the jack-o'-lantern, above. Hint: Scrape away a lot of the inside wall to make this pumpkin work well.

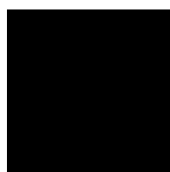


E-HALLOWEEN

LOL: Now, a 21st-Century Jack-o'-Lantern



The emoticon pumpkin, above, updates a centuries-old holiday. Instead of carving freehand, use the template below or print one out from www.washingtonpost.com/weekend. Tape the template firmly to the pumpkin, top right. (Be sure to tape the template on the pumpkin sideways to create the emoticon look.) Use a sturdy straight pin to poke holes through the template to create a pattern on the pumpkin, above right. After you've poked holes, it will be easier to go back over them with a knife to make the finished cuts.



CRAZY CRITTERS

Don't Feel Like Carving? No Problem.



You can embellish small squashes, gourds and pumpkins using glue dots, tape, a few fake or dried flowers and ears of Indian corn.



Glue dots help fasten decorations and even keep stacked gourds firmly in place.



Leaves are glued to the squash, above. Use a nail to punch a hole in the top of the squash.



After removing the nail, put a toothpick in the hole created by the nail. It holds the stacked squashes together, forming the head and body of a critter. Create eyes, nose and mouth using twigs, radishes or leaves. Let your imagination run wild: Critters can come in all shapes and sizes, at left and top.

PROP MASTER

One New Scare Tactic: Give It the Ax



To create this pumpkin, you have to be willing to be a little out of your gourd. Adding a prop or two (gory or not) can help make your pumpkin stand out. First, turn your pumpkin around so that the stem, which becomes the nose, is at the center of your carving area.



Tools for carving your pumpkins: cookie cutters, straight pins, saws from a pumpkin carving kit, eight-inch chef knife, paring knife, metal spoon and hammer.



With the stem facing forward, take a sliver off what is now the bottom of the pumpkin. This will let the pumpkin sit flat.



Use a paring knife to detail the eyes and teeth.



To lighten the eyes and teeth, scrape away the outer skin of the pumpkin.

Instead of carving the traditional jack-o'-lantern, try your hand at a pumpkin with a feline bent. Let our template be your guide.



Air & Scare

Discover the strange and spooky side of aviation at the National Air and Space Museum's third annual Air & Scare!

A Halloween event for all ages

Enjoy face painting, story-telling, free simulator rides, hands-on activities, trick-or-treating, FABULOUS PRIZES, and meet your favorite Star Wars characters!

Call (202) 633-1000 or visit www.nasm.si.edu/airandscare for details.

Air & Scare is made possible by the generous support of MARS SNACK FOOD, US, LLC.

Saturday, October 27, 4 – 8 p.m.
Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center
Chantilly, Virginia
(free admission; parking \$10)



Smithsonian
National Air and Space Museum
Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center